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C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 002965

SIPDIS

DEPARMENT FOR NEA/ELA, NEA/IPA,

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [SCUL](#) [UNESCO](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: IMPLEMENTING MUGHRABI GATE PROJECT REMAINS
JORDAN'S PRIORITY

REF: A. PARIS 1944
[1](#)B. AMMAN 2632 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) The MFA's Director of Policy Planning and Research, Omar Nahar - Post's primary GOJ contact on the matter of planned construction of a new ascent to the Mughrabi Gate entrance to the Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount - gave PolOff a readout of the GOJ's latest views on October 21. The meeting took place against the background of a highly contentious UNESCO Executive Board Session on the subject in Paris (Ref A), but Nahar did not offer any further substance on Jordan's view of those developments. He reiterated that Jordan sees the ascent to the Mughrabi Gate as part of the Muslim Waqf and is thus part of Jordan's responsibility - based on the historical status quo, international conventions, and reinforced by the 1994 Jordan-Israel peace treaty (Refs B and previous).

[1](#)2. (C) In describing Jordan's ideal regarding the project, Nahar preferred using the word "implementing" rather than "controlling." Jordan wants the Waqf to physically handle any construction with its own people doing the work, said Nahar, who argued that considerable precedent exists for Waqf oversight of such projects in Jerusalem. Nahar recognized that Israel likely sees the Mughrabi Gate ascent as separate from the Haram Al-Sharif and therefore not part of the Waqf, but he asserted that Jordan does not draw that distinction. Jordan would be open to Israeli input regarding the planning and construction of the new ascent, but it would want that input to be offered behind the scenes, he concluded.

[1](#)3. (C) Nahar said Jordan resubmitted a request to Israel seeking access to the site several weeks ago, but there had been no response. He was unaware of revisions to the Israeli plans - which PolOff noted were modified so that the prayer area in front of the Western Wall was not expanded as Jordan feared - but opined that if this were the case "it would be great news, positive." PolOff observed that there is an apparent contradiction between dwelling on Israel's perceived freezing Jordan out of the planning and decision-making process on one hand, and adhering to a more fundamental objection that the Jordanian Waqf should oversee the whole project on the other. Nahar was coy, however, when asked to lay out Jordan's bottom line: "I cannot give you an answer to the question of whether, if Israel implemented the Jordanian design, would we be happy. We would be happier if we did it (ourselves)."

[1](#)4. (C) Comment: The King, who has told us he cannot be seen to abdicate his custodial role over the Holy Sites, fears domestic questions about his legitimacy were he to back down on this issue. Indeed, over the past several days both Foreign Minister Salah Al-Bashir and Advisor to the King on

Religious and Cultural Affairs Prince Ghazi have raised this point with the Ambassador. Ghazi became quite emotional and animated as he warned that "this is not only destabilizing, it is delegitimizing." The Mughrabi Gate issue is taking on greater urgency in the face of a lack of visible progress in the Annapolis process, and a widespread perception that Israel continues to assert itself in Jerusalem and the Palestinian territories by building the separation barrier, expanding settlements, and restricting Palestinian movement. The increasing symbolism of "control" may make it less likely that Jordan would be open to a hypothetical practical solution to the Israeli-Jordanian competition on this matter, such as establishing greater Jordanian input into or influence over the design of the ascent. End Comment.

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Beecroft